

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-14 SAM-01 SAB-01 OMB-01

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R 291540Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6643

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 11913

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, IS, VT

SUBJECT: VATICAN AND CAPUCCI CASE

REF: A) ROME 11810; B) JERUSALEM 1618

1. MELCHITE PATRIARCH MAXIMOS V HAKIM DEPARTED ROME AUGUST 28 FOR NORTHERN EUROPE, BUT WILL RETURN IN ABOUT TEN DAYS FOR FURTHER TALKS WITH ARCHBISHOP CASAROLI AND PERHAPS WILL ALSO SEE POPE PAUL. ACCORDING TO ARCHBISHOP BENELLI, VATICAN'S DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE, DURING AUGUST 27 CONVERSATION BETWEEN CASAROLI AND MAXIMOS IT WAS DECIDED THAT CHURCH SHOULD TAKE NO STEPS UNTIL IT CLEAR WHETHER GOI INTENDS TO PROSECUTE ARCHBISHOP CAPUCCI OR NOT. BENELLI STATED THAT TO DATE VATICAN HAD HAD NO CONTACT ON CASE WITH ISRAELI EMBASSY ROME.

2. MAXIMOS TOLD CASAROLI THAT HE NOT AT ALL CONVINCED THAT CAPUCCI WAS REALLY AWARE THAT ARMS WERE BEING SMUGGLED IN HIS
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AUTOMOBILE, IF INDEED THIS WAS THE CASE. ACCORDING TO PATRIARCH,

ISRAELI AUTHORITIES HAVE BLOWN INCIDENT OUT OF ALL PROPORTION WHICH LEADS ONE TO DOUBT THEIR INTENTIONS. PATRIARCH ADMITTED, HOWEVER, THAT CAPUCCI HAD BEEN GUILTY OF "IMPRUDENCE". WHEN WE ASKED BENELLI WHAT THIS IMPRUDENCE MIGHT HAVE CONSISTED OF, HE REPLIED THAT CAPUCCI IS "TYPICALLY UNSUSPECTING AND OVERLY KIND-HEARTED CHURCHMAN" AND MAY HAVE DELIVERED PACKAGES TO PERSONS IN JERUSALEM FROM FRIENDS IN LEBANON WITHOUT SUSPECTING THAT THEY MAY HAVE CONTAINED ARMS. BENELLI EXPRESSED PUZZLEMENT THAT GOI IMMEDIATELY HAD SEIZED UPON CAPUCCI AS GUILTY PARTY EVEN IF ARMS WERE FOUND IN HIS CAR AND WONDERS WHY, FOR EXAMPLE, BLAME HAD NOT BEEN PLACED ON CHAUFFEUR OR ANYONE ELSE HAVING ACCESS TO VEHICLE. BENELLI ALSO SAID VATICAN TOTALLY UNAWARE OF CAPUCCI'S ALLEGED CONFESSION AS REPORTED REFTEL B.

3. BENELLI SAID PATRIARCH MAXIMOS APPEARED SURPRISINGLY UNPERTURBED ABOUT WHOLE MATTER DURING HIS ROME VISIT.

4. WHEN ASKED WHETHER VATICAN WOULD CONSIDER TRANSFERRING CAPUCCI SHOULD GOI REQUEST THIS IN EXCHANGE FOR DROPPING CHARGES, BENELLI REPLIED THAT VATICAN WOULD CROSS THAT BRIDGE WHEN THEY CAME TO IT.

5. COMMENT: RUMORS ARE ALREADY CIRCULATING ROME THAT GOI MAY HAVE ARRESTED CAPUCCI IN ORDER TO BARGAIN WITH VATICAN ON ITS POLICY ON JERUSALEM AND HOLY PLACES IN EXCHANGE FOR PRELATE'S RELEASE. THIS WOULD APPEAR TO US, HOWEVER, TO BE VERY SPECIOUS REASONING ON PART OF GOI IF IT WERE TRUE. VATICAN WOULD CERTAINLY BE INTRANSIGENT ON ITS JERUSALEM POLICY WHICH IS QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE AND VITAL RELIGIOUS INTERESTS. ALSO, ANY SUCH ATTEMPT BY ISRAELI COULD TRIGGER WORLDWIDE OUTCRY FROM CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES. TRANSFER OF CAPUCCI MIGHT BE FEASIBLE, HOWEVER, SHOULD PATRIARCH MAXIMOS AGREE. THE MELCHITE CHURCH ENJOYS CONSIDERABLE AUTONOMY FROM VATICAN AND ANY SUCH TRANSFER WOULD NOT REQUIRE VATICAN APPROVAL. VOLPE

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